THE ROLE OF MARY AS CO-RECAPITULATOR IN ST IRENAEUS OF LYONS[1]

BY

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ABSTRACT: In this article, the author takes up the theme of Marian consideration in the thought of Irenaeus, long considered by many to have been exhaustively addressed by past scholarship. But there is yet ground to be covered: this study addresses the hitherto neglected theme of co-recapitulation as it applies to Mary in the Irenaean corpus. What to make of Irenaeus' assertions of an active, dynamic participation in the salvation process by the 'obedient virgin'? Arguing against the possibility that Irenaeus is driven primarily by aesthetic concerns, the author posits a reading of Irenaeus that finds in Mary's person an integral and essential component of a theologically coherent system of personal and social recapitulation.

When Jean Plagnieux wrote in 1970 that 'tout, semblerait-il, a été dit, et depuis fort longtemps, au sujet de la doctrine mariale d'Irénée',[2] he expressed a sentiment to which the paucity of Marian investigation in recent Irenaean scholarship has borne larger witness. Yet the role of Mary in the thought of Irenaeus may still be of interest to scholars, as there remain aspects of his 'doctrine mariale' which have not, in fact, received adequate attention. In particular, the aesthetic power and value of the cyclical Eve-Mary parallel, standing alongside that of Adam-Christ in a recapitulative conception of the salvation economy, has led scholars to address Irenaean Mariology primarily from this starting point. In other words, the usual beginning has been the assertion, prevalent throughout the Irenaean corpus, that Eve and Mary *are* contrastingly paralleled, *are* dramatically involved in the larger saga of the human economy, *are* integral to the recapitulative movements of the fall and redemption, and

[1] I am deeply indebted to Fr Thomas G. Weinandy, OFM Cap., Oxford, and Dr Charles Wilson, St Olaf College, USA, for their thoughtful comments on earlier versions of this text.

[2] Plagnieux, 'La doctrine mariale de saint Irénée', *Revue des sciences religieuses*, 44 (1970) 179.

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reflections have then been laid upon this framework. Yet there is the antecedent 'why?' that must be the basis for these assertions, and scholarship has proven remarkably quiet on this eminently relevant question. Irenaeus certainly provides a remarkable development of the Eve-Mary parallel as found in more primitive forms in earlier writers, but is there a coherent theological basis for his powerful statements on the active influence of Eve and Mary upon the larger condition of all humanity? In the case of Mary in particular, is there a sound theological or anthropological motive for the idea that the mother of Christ is herself recapitulative, dynamically involved in the salvation of humanity; or is Irenaeus simply moving backwards from the notable parallelism of the incarnate Jesus, His mother and the first human couple, eisegetically reading a deeper meaning into what is essentially a doctrine of the aesthetic?

In this paper I shall argue that, despite the genuine fact of the aesthetic value to the Eve-Mary parallel and Irenaeus' heavy use of it, there is an aspect of his anthropology which makes this parallel not only 'pleasing' and 'fitting',[3] but actually necessary and essential. In particular, I will suggest that Irenaeus' anthropology provides for a distinction between the individual or essential aspect of human nature and that of humanity as social creature, typified separately and distinctly in the persons of Adam and Eve, and will argue that from within such a context, a socially recapitulative 'new Eve' is in fact a soteriological necessity. By the end of the paper, I intend to show that Irenaeus was not only the first Christian author to integrate the figure of Mary into his theology in an expansive and major way, but was also the first theologian whose anthropology was developed in such a manner as to justify, warrant and require that the salvation wrought by Christ be worked out in concert with the society of humankind, typified first in Eve and later in Mary.

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[3] Characteristic terms in Irenaeus, e.g. 4.6.2; see Hoh, *Die Lehre des hl. Irenäus über das Neue Testament* (Münster: 1919) 112; Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: University Press, 2001) 18. Throughout the present text, references to Irenaeus are cited according to standard convention: '2.22.4' refers to *Adversus haereses* book 2, chapter 22, section 4; '*Epid.* 15' refers to *Epideixis* chapter 15. All quotations, together with their numeration, are taken from the *Sources Chrétiennes* critical editions. References to the Nag Hammadi Library: 'NHC (I,3) 16.31-34' refers to the *Nag Hammadi Codices*, codex I, tractate 3, page 16, lines 31-34 (ed. J.R. Robinson).

Uses of Mary in Irenaeus

Irenaeus' use of Mary in the course of both his anti-Gnostic polemic and positive theological development is extensive. The corpus as it is currently preserved contains no less than 65 passages that directly mention or obviously allude to the person of the mother of Christ (48 sections of the *AH* and 17 chapters of the *Epid.*), the majority of which fall into three broad categories: the anti-docetist, in which the person of Mary is used as partial or complete proof that the Son of God had become truly man in the Incarnation; the anti-adoptionist, almost always tied in with extensive Scriptural quotation in evidence of Mary's fulfilment of prophecy and used to argue that the Christ was not an ordinary man adopted by God for the work of salvation, but in fact the one Son of God become man; and finally the recapitulative or regenerative, in which context the Eve-Mary parallel and obedient virgin themes arise. It is this final category that will be most relevant to the present discussion, but its context can properly be set only through a brief examination of the other two.

Both the anti-docetist and anti-adoptionist uses of Mary by Irenaeus are eminently Christological, as one would expect both of such discussions and the general trend of Marian reflection in the first and second centuries. Prior to Irenaeus there seems to have been little interest in the figure of Mary expressed in writing, apart from any direct relevance she may have had upon the coming of the person of Christ.[4] While Irenaeus presents us with some of the first patristic passages on a distinct role of Mary beyond that of God-bearer, he is nonetheless influenced by the more general tradition of Marian reflection and makes extensive use of her potential for providing counter-evidence against what he perceives as the most common and ill-fated Christological errors of his Gnostic opponents. These latter

[4] Mention of Mary in the Apostolic Fathers is addressed below. For a general survey of Mary in pre-Irenaean patristic thought, see Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999) 23-50. The person of Mary is elaborately treated in the *Protoevangelion of James*, of which a brief section (13.1) is devoted to a parallel with the Genesis account of Adam and Eve. The dating of the *Protoevangelion* is, however, now usually placed at the end of the second-century, either contemporary with or slightly later than Irenaeus; see Elliot, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) 48-57.

did have their own views on the Mary figure as a part of their various cosmologies and anthropologies, but it was not so much their conception of her that offended Irenaeus' sensibilities as the 'logical' conclusions regarding the person of Christ to which they led. Irenaeus saw in the late second century what various fathers and councils of the fourth and fifth would see during the height of the Christological controversy, namely that a flawed perception of Mary leads ultimately to a flawed perception of the person of Jesus Christ: either that He was not in fact made man, or that He was not fully or the same God as reigned in heaven.

These two views are almost always intrinsically intertwined in the Gnostic systems with which Irenaeus was faced. That the divinity should in some manner come to effect the redemption of humanity was a common thread among most of the sects of the day; the manner in which this redeemer might come to work among men, however, was extremely varied.[5] Irenaeus incredulously sets forth a number of the Gnostics' solutions to this question in *AH* 1:[6] from the Ptolemaean Valentinian assertion of the aeonic Saviour's possession of the spiritual seed from Achamoth and 'passage through' Mary 'as water passes through a tube', to exist among humanity and reveal to those of a spiritual nature the reality of their true selves;[7] to the Marcosian doctrine of a revelator-Christ who made the transcendent Bythos known to humanity for the first time;[8] to the belief of the followers of Simon Magus, Menander, Saturninus and Basilides that the divine Saviour had descended into the persons of these individuals or those whom

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[5] For an outline of Gnostic redeemer systems, see Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: the message of the alien God and the beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001) 74-91; Rudolph, *Gnosis: the nature and history of Gnosticism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983) 113-171; Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy—A Study in the History of Gnosticism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) 211-240.

[6] For the purposes of the present investigation, the question of Irenaeus' accuracy as regards his presentation of these systems is of less importance than his perception of them, for it is the latter that influenced his response. E. Pagels has argued against Irenaeus' reliability: Pagels, 'Conflicting versions of Valentinian eschatology: Irenaeus's treatise versus the excerpts from Theodotus', *Harvard Theological Review*, 67 (1974) 53. Her argument has been challenged by R.M. Grant, 'Review of *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis* and *The Gnostic Paul*, by Elaine Pagels', *Religious Studies Review* 3 (1977) 30-34; and Ferguson, 'The Rule of Truth and Irenaean rehetoric in book 1 of *Against Heresies*', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 55 (2001) 356-357.

[7] 1.7.2. cf. *Gospel of Truth* NHC (I,3) 18.11-21; 20.23-21.2.

[8] 1.19. Marcus was himself a disciple of Valentinus with many similarities of soteriological thought, see Rudolph, *Gnosis* 196, 209.

they had identified, in order to bring the revelation of truth from above yet escape from the corrupted reality of the material order (e.g., suffering, death);[9] to the Carpocratian, Cerinthian and Ebionite doctrines of a good and steadfast man, Jesus, being adopted from above to bring revelation to the world.[10] The list goes on, notably to include the Marcionites, Sethians, Encratites, Barbeliotes and others, most of whom (though not all) present a redeemer figure of some kind who brings about either the beginning or the fulfilment of the redemption process.

The intensely dualistic cosmologies and anthropologies of the larger Gnostic framework[11] made it largely impossible to conceive of the coming of a saviour figure into the material realm by anything other than docetic or adoptionistic means. Gnostic soteriologies, in common with aspects of the larger Hellenic philosophical tradition, were wont to protect the transcendence of the divine and its complete separation from material corruptibility by insisting that any divine activity within the lower order must be mediated either through an only apparent contact with materiality and its consequential corruptibility,[12] or the divine inspiration and possession of a lower, material creature in order to achieve a desired direction of the human species.[13] For Irenaeus, neither of these views could be squared against his essential belief that the unique Son of the one God had become man and entered into the human economy in order to save it;[14] yet the mere fact of his objection to their conceptual schemes did not have the potential for swaying the Gnostics to a right belief.[15] To this end he required some means of demonstrating the logical impossibility of their varied doctrines via a widespread, common point of departure, and he found this means in the person of Mary.

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[9] 1.23-24.

[10] 1.25-26.

[11] On the general tendency toward dualism in Gnostic thought, see Rudolph, *Gnosis* 59-67f; Jonas, *Gnostic Religion* 42-47. That this dualism may be overstated in contemporary scholarship is argued in Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"—An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) 49-50, 96, 116-138.

[12] Hence the docetism of Simon Magus and Basilides; 1.23-24.

[13] Hence the adoptionism of Carpocrates, Cerinthus, the Ebionites, the Sethians and others; 1.25-26, 30.

[14] Irenaeus' cardinal thesis and centrepiece of his 'rule of faith': 3.4.2; 3.16.6; 4.2.7; 5.36.3; *Epid.* 6.

[15] Always Irenaeus' aim in his refutation of their doctrine: 2.17.1; 3.16.8; 3.25.7; 4.praef.2; 5.praef.

The Gnostic picture of Mary's role in the bringing forth of the Saviour, where it exists at all, is characterised by Irenaeus with an air of exasperation. That she was merely a conduit through which the divine Saviour passed 'as if through a tube' was apparently a commonplace belief and a typical demonstration of Gnostic docetism.[16] Irenaeus responds with a refutation based on a different interpretation of the same birth event: the reality of Christ's true humanity is guaranteed by his birth from a human woman, who by conceiving and giving birth imparts her own human nature to her child. To those who deny such a transmission of humanity from parent to offspring, Irenaeus responds: 'They err who allege that [Christ] took nothing from the Virgin'[17] and insists that evidence of the humanity received by Christ is found, for example, in His 'fellowship with us in the matter of food',[18] namely that He ate 'butter and honey' in the presence of the disciples. The 'extraordinary energy'[19] with which Irenaeus combats the docetism of the Gnostics is explained by his insistence that only the true Son of God made truly and wholly man could effect the recapitulation of human life necessary for the economy of salvation to advance, and further that only the true Son made true man could give meaning to the cross.[20]

> Si enim non accepit ab homine substantiam carnis, neque homo factus est neque Filius hominis. Et si non hoc factus est quod nos eramus, non magnum faciebat quod passus est et sustinuit.[21]

The list of attributes which Irenaeus believes Jesus 'took from Mary' (e.g. humanity with all its characteristics of hunger, fatigue, sadness, pain, etc.)[22] is meant to show that His human birth guaranteed the fullness of His own humanity; but as anti-docetic arguments these statements are not fully convincing. Certainly a deity seeming to appear as a man could also

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[16] 1.7.2, 3.11.3, 3.16.1; see Rudolph, *Gnosis* 148-158 and cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 31.7.4.

[17] 3.22.1.

[18] 3.18.3, 3.22.2; cf. Is 7.15.

[19] Sesboüé, *Tout récapituler dans le Christ: Christologie et sotériologie d'Irénée de Lyon* (Paris: Desclée, 2000) 71.

[20] A theme later emphasized by Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 7, 9.

[21] 3.22.1 (SC 211 pp. 432-3): 'For if He did not receive the substance of flesh from a human being, He neither was made man nor the Son of man; and if He was not made what we were, He did no great thing in what He suffered and endured.'

[22] 3.22.2.

'seem' to suffer, eat, be thirty or suffer pain, and Irenaeus is aware that the Gnostics argued as such.[23] His truly powerful anti-docetist arguments come rather in the context of his reflections upon the deeper realities indicated and made possible by these attributes: the flesh received from Mary made the Son of God's suffering on the cross a 'great thing', for it was a true, corporeal suffering. The physical body made possible the resting of the Spirit upon Christ.[24] His hunger and thirst made possible the genuine temptation in the desert which was necessary in the defeat of Satan.[25] Most importantly, the resurrection of Christ's true flesh is the guarantor of the fleshly resurrection of all humanity.[26] For Irenaeus, the starting point for these and all such reflections was in the Incarnation of the Son through the human Mary, which itself provided the basis for a refutation of Gnostic docetism.

As intimated above, this anti-docetist polemic is almost always intertwined with an anti-adoptionist argument. Not only is the Son truly man, but the man Jesus truly is the Son. The Sethian Gnostics ('Ophites') and the Ebionites were the most vocal proponents of the doctrine that Jesus the man was born from Mary and Joseph 'in the usual way',[27] purified and sanctified, finally to receive the Christ by the descent of the Spirit (or the 'Saviour') at His baptism. Irenaeus was aware that such a doctrine conflicted with his recapitulative understanding of salvation, and thus he was faced with the need to demonstrate that the birth of Christ was in fact the birth of the Son and not just a 'normal' man. Again, the person of Mary became an effective tool in his polemic, and this primarily through her indicative value as the 'token' or evidence of the fulfilment of the prophecies of Scripture. The prophets, above all Isaias,[28] had clearly indicated, at least in Irenaeus' reading, that the advent of the Messiah would be identical with the advent of the Son of God and would be indicated by a miraculous birth from a virgin. Irenaeus is an ardent supporter of

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[23] 5.12.1-6; cf. *Apocalypse of James* NHC (V,3) 31.15-26; *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* NHC (VII,2) 55.14-56.5; *Epistle of Peter to Philip* NHC (VIII,2) 139.9-23.

[24] 5.1.2.

[25] 5.21.1-3.

[26] 5.7, 9, 13; and generally the whole of *AH* 5.

[27] 3.19.1. This idea is also found in certain strands of Valentinian Gnosticism, cf. *Excerpts of Theodotus* 59.1-4, 60. Hippolytus recounts what appears to have been a dispute between regional forms of Valentinianism over whether the body born of Mary was psychic or pneumatic, *Refutation* 35.5; see Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"* 290 n. 27.

[28] Is 7.14-16; see *Epid.* 53-4.

the Septuagint translation's 'virgin' (παρθένος) and not 'young woman'[29] for precisely this reason: it was the virgin birth that made evident Jesus' identity as the promised Messiah, that made Mary the 'token' indicating the coming of the Son of God into the world.[30] The miracle of the birth bore witness to the miracle of the person; without the first miracle, one could not be certain of the second.

Irenaeus is happy to quote Scripture *ad nauseam* in evidence of Jesus' identity as the Son of God, and it is revealing that a number of these quotations involve the role of His mother. In quoting Paul,[31] for example, Irenaeus draws attention to the fact that 'God sent forth His Son, made of a woman'; and the whole affair of the Annunciation is presented as evidence that Mary's offspring was of divine as well as human origin.[32] The salutation of John the Forerunner to the unborn Jesus from within the womb of Elisabeth is given as further evidence of Jesus' divine character.[33] One wonders, however, how effective these extensive Scriptural quotations will actually have been in persuading Irenaeus' opponents of his view, for they require as a foundation a belief in the true witness of Scripture as it was preserved in the 'tradition of the Apostles',[34] and it was not uncommon for the Gnostics to edit or omit Scripture of which they disapproved, or to exegete it in a manner that provided for wholly different interpretations than those to which Irenaeus was willing to give service.[35] The sheer extent of the Scriptural witness to the event of the virgin birth appears, however, to have convinced Irenaeus of its validity as an anti-Gnostic defence: where one or two supporting passages in a single book might have failed to persuade convincingly, multiple passages drawn from not only multiple books but multiple 'testaments'[36] that spanned centuries, yet all witnessed to the same miraculous event, held the potential for effective persuasion.

In all, the anti-docetic and anti-adoptionist uses of Marian references combine into Irenaeus' view of the double-generation of Christ: the gen-

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[29] Is 7.14.

[30] 3.21.2-4; *Epid.* 57.

[31] 3.16.3 (ref. Gal 4.4-5).

[32] 3.16.2, 4.23.1 (ref. Lk 1.26-38; Mt 1.18-25).

[33] 3.16.4.

[34] *Epid.* 98.

[35] 3.14.(1-)4, 3.15.1-3.

[36] A modern classification, of course unknown to Irenaeus; see Behr, *On the Apostolic Preaching* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997) 8 n. 1.

eration from the divine Father, and the generation from a human mother.[37] Plagnieux contended that:

> Or la doctrine mariale est présentée comme pierre de touche et garantie de ces deux vérités, pôles de la christologie authentique: le Christ vrai homme, autrement dit chair, Verbe incarné, parce que né d'une femme veritablement mère, *ex Maria*; le Christ vrai Dieu, par ce qu'ainsi né d'elle, il s'origine pourtant de plus haut qu'elle, de Dieu même, de Dieu seul, par l'engendrement virginal, *ex Maria Virgine*,—comme en témoignent les symboles de la foi antique, résumant l'Ecriture.[38]

While Irenaeus never speaks of 'two natures' in Christ in the manner that would be current several centuries later in Chalcedon, he speaks of the 'two generations' of Christ to largely the same effect. He who has His source both in the divine godhead and the human species thus has both divine power and human limitation,[39] and proof of the double-generation thus serves as proof of the incarnate Christ's true 'nature' as the God-man. Irenaeus emphasises this most directly in a passage which P. Galtier long ago called 'l'affirmation la plus expressive peut-être qui se trouve aux tròis [*sic*.] premiers siècles de la virginale maternité de Marie':[40]

> qui eum ex Virgine Emmanuel praedicabant adunitionem Verbi Dei ad plasma ejus manifestabant; quoniam Verbum caro erit et Filius Dei Filius hominis, purus pure puram aperiens vulvam eam quae regenerat homines in Deum, quam ipse puram fecit (ὁ καθαρὸς καθαρῶς τὴν καθαρὰν ἀνοίξας μήτραν τὴν ἀναγεννῶσαν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους εἰς Θεόν, ἣν αὐτὸς καθαρὰν πεποίηκε); et hoc factus quod et nos, Deus fortis, et inenarrabile habet genus.[41]

This passage reveals not only the doctrine of double-generation which is the apex of Irenaeus' anti-docetic and anti-adoptionist arguments, its mention of the womb of the Virgin as that which 'regenerates men unto

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[37] 3.19.2, 5.1.2-3; Sesboüé, *Tout récapituler* 73-80, esp. 75.

[38] Plagnieux, 'La doctrine mariale', 180.

[39] Sesboüé, *Tout récapituler* 75.

[40] Galtier, 'La vierge que nous régénère', *Recherches de science religieuse*, 5 (1914) 137.

[41] 4.33.11 (SC 100 pp. 830-1): 'Those [of the prophets] who proclaimed Him as Emmanuel, born of the Virgin, manifested the union of the Word of God with His own handiwork, declaring that the Word should become flesh and the Son of God the Son of man, the Pure One opening purely that pure womb which regenerates men unto God—and which He Himself made pure. And having become what we also are, He is still the Mighty God and possesses an indescribable generation.' Galtier's article (op. cit.) corrects Massuet's erroneous assertion that the term 'virgin' refers, in this passage and in 4.33.4, to the Church.

God' begins to reveal the third great theological use of the Mother of God: the regenerative or recapitulative. The number of Marian references in the Irenaean corpus that fall into this category is smaller than for the two previous, due largely to the fact that there is no directly coordinate error among the Gnostic systems which they are called upon to refute; yet anyone who spends time with the works of this author cannot but be impacted by the weight these passages carry within his larger thought.

Mary's role in the dual-generation of the incarnate Christ has, in one sense, a predominantly biological cast: human woman yields human child. But Irenaeus expands upon this idea through what is at times a subtle, at others a direct comparison with the 'first generation' whereby human productivity took its roots: the generation wrought of Adam and Eve. Since their sin and fall, human generation had been caught in the web of the consequences of those actions. Though creating life, human generation also bound to death the thing generated, for it was generated from within the context of sin and into a world of sin (Ps 50.7 LXX), namely the arch-sin of disobedience, the consequence of which is death.[42] The disobedience of human life had brought corruption even to human generation, man's part in divine creation. To use language more typical of Irenaeus, human disobedience had turned the 'inheritance' of man from life to death, a fatal move only to be corrected in the coming of Christ.[43] His generation was distinctive and different:

> quod generatum est sanctum est et filius Altissimi Dei Patris omnium, qui operatus est incarnationem ejus et novam ostendit generationem (καινὴν δείξαντος γέννησιν), uti, quemadmodum per priorem generationem (διὰ τῆς προτέρας γεννήσεως) mortem hereditavimus, sic per generationem hanc hereditaremus vitam.[44]

The 'former generation' and 'new generation' are the starting points of the explicit parallel between what Irenaeus considers the historical account of Adam and Eve, and the more recent historical event of Jesus' life and Marian parentage. The morbid offspring of Adam and Eve was a physi-

[42] On the primacy of disobedience: 5.19.1, 5.27.2; *Epid.* 15, 16, 34. On death as consequence: 5.23.1-2, 5.27.2; *Epid.* 17.

[43] 3.5.3, 3.12.11, 4.11.1.

[44] 5.1.3 (SC 153 pp. 26-7): 'That which was generated [by Mary] is a holy thing, and is the Son of the Most High God, the Father of all and the one who effected the incarnation <of His Son> and showed forth a new generation, that as by the former generation we inherited death, so by this new generation we might inherit life.'

cal man (Cain) bound to death and corruption,[45] whilst that of Mary was likewise a physical man, yet one united to life, restoring the potential for human incorruptibility. Orbe is astute in asserting this as the starting point for the whole schema of the Mary-Eve parallel and contrast: the evident fact of the difference in the persons generated by them, declared explicitly in Scripture.[46] Mariological reflection in the early Church always began here, using consideration of the Scriptural and traditional witness to identify just how far the parallel might be expanded. Such was the method espoused by Justin, who provides us with our earliest extant treatment of this parallelism (the Marian references in the Apostolic Fathers and other pre-Irenaean authors falling into the anti-docetic and anti-adoptionist/prophetic fulfilment categories, but not significantly broaching the parallelism between Eve and Mary).[47] For Justin, St Paul's contrast between Adam and Christ (1 Cor 15.22, 45) had a direct parallel in Eve and Mary:

> [Christ] became man by the Virgin, in order that the disobedience which proceeded from the serpent might receive its destruction in the same manner in which it derived its origin. For Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy, and when the angel Gabriel announced the good tidings to her [. . .] she replied, 'Be it unto me according to Thy word'.[48]

There is no shortage of scholarly assertion of the similarity between this passage from the *Dialogue with Trypho* and Irenaeus' treatment of the same theme,[49] and it is certain that Irenaeus had in fact read Justin.[50] We need not necessarily accept with the enthusiasm of Orbe the idea that Irenaeus was directly dependant on him for this argument, as there is evidence that

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[45] The generation of Cain is compellingly treated in Orbe, *Antropología de San Ireneo* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1969) 246.

[46] ibid., plus the whole of 244-253; and Orbe, *Espiritualidad de San Ireneo* (Rome: Gregorian Pontifical Institute, 1989) 315-330. See Gen 4.1f; Lk 2f.

[47] E.g. Aristides, *Apology* (fragment) in PG 96.1108-24; Ignatius of Antioch, *Ephesians* 7, 18; *Trallians* 9; *Smyrnaeans* 1.

[48] Justin, *Dial.* 100.

[49] E.g. Orbe, *Teología de San Ireneo: comentario al Libro V del 'Adversus Haereses'* (Madrid: La Editorial Católica, 1985-1988) 326; Orbe, *Antropología* 246; Ramos-Lissón, 'Le rôle de la femme dans la théologie de saint Irénée', *Studia Patristica*, 21 (1989) 169.

[50] Justin's lost *Treatise Against Marcion* is quoted in 4.6.2, and an unspecified text by Justin, also lost, is quoted in 5.26.2. Familiarity with Justin's disciple, Tatian, is evidenced in 1.28.1. See Behr, *Apostolic Preaching* 1, 11-13.

the Eve-Mary comparison was appealing and evident to a fairly widespread Christian population from the second century onwards.[51] But Justin is our first example of an author expanding the contrasting Eve-Mary parallel to include a reflection upon the means of the engendering of their relative offspring: Eve heeds the serpent and thus disobeys God, thereby bringing forth corruption and death. Mary heeds the word of the angel and thus obeys God, thereby engendering a 'holy thing' that is the source of life and incorruption.

These themes are taken up by Irenaeus and further expanded in an elaborate reflection upon the Scriptural witness of the two women. Both were espoused to men whilst yet virgins;[52] both gave heed to an angel, Eve to the fallen angel speaking in the serpent and Mary to the archangel Gabriel;[53] both were faced with the decision to heed or abandon the will and charge of God.[54] And for each parallel, Irenaeus discloses a point of contrast: Eve's change from virgin to mother was the result of seduction, sin and disobedience to the command of God, while Mary's transition to motherhood was in perfect accord with the divine will, to such a degree that not even her virginity was lost.[55] Eve was convinced, through her own lack of faith and the lie of the serpent, to disobey the charge of God, while Mary's faith in the word of the angel led her to obey God's command. For each point of paralleled dilemma, Eve and Mary respond and act in the opposite, each the antithesis of the other. This is epitomised in the contrast of obedience and disobedience, the supreme virtue and cardinal sin in Irenaean thought. Like unto Christ's obedience was Mary's, for just as Christ was obedient in a manner directly converse to Adam's disobedience,[56] so was Mary obedient in exact contrast to Eve's disobedience.

> Maria Virgo obaudiens (ἡ παρθένος ὑπήκοος) inuenitur dicens: *Ecce ancilla tua, Domine, fiat mihi secundum uerbum tuum*. Eua uero inobaudiens (ἀπειθής): non obaudiuit enim adhuc cum esset uirgo. [. . .] inobaudiens facta, et sibi et uniuerso generi humano causa facta est mortis (τῇ πάσῃ ἀνθρωπότητι αἰτία ἐγένετο

[51] Including later writers who will not have read Irenaeus or Justin, e.g. Jacob of Sarug, *Homily 1 on the Mother of God*, 625-631 (ed. Hansbury/Brock [1998], pp. 27-34); Ephrem of Edessa, *Diatessaron* 2.2 (SC 121, p. 66); see Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers* 116-119.

[52] 3.21.4-6, 3.22.4, 5.19.1.

[53] 4.23.1, 5.19.1.

[54] 3.22.4; *Epid.* 33.

[55] A point argued by Orbe, *Antropología* 246-247.

[56] *Epid.* 37, 98.

> θανάτου), sic et Maria habens praedestinatum uirum, et tamen Virgo, obaudiens, et sibi et uniuerso generi humano causa facta est salutis (τῇ πάσῃ ἀνθρωπότητι αἰτία ἐγένετο σωτηρίας). Et propter hoc lex eam quae desponsata erat uiro, licet uirgo sit adhuc, uxorem eius qui desponsauerat uocat, eam quae est a Maria in Euam recirculationem (ἀνακύκλησις) significans: quia non aliter quod colligatum est solueretur, nisi ipsae compagines adligationis reflectantur retrorsus, uti primae coniunctiones soluantur per secundas secundae rursus liberent primas [. . .].[57]

Here Mary is not only regenerative, but recapitulative. The contrast between her obedience and Eve's disobedience is extended to include an influence over other generations of men. In Eve's case this is eminently reasonable: she whose actions instigate sin and fallenness, and thus death and corruptibility, thereby has a direct influence upon those generations which shall come after her and be born into a world with such characteristics. In the case of Mary, however, the nature of the influence is less clear. Certainly she has an influence on future generations through her actions (as any human might), and on past generations through her Son, but this is not the limit of Irenaeus' exposition. He goes on to describe the 'knot' of disobedience engendered by Eve, which had bound humanity fast since the Fall, loosed *by Mary* (not by her Son) through her obedience to God.[58] Mary is the 'advocate' of Eve,[59] the one who herself 'destroys virginal disobedience' by her own virginal obedience[60] and thus becomes the 'cause of salvation'[61] for all of humankind. In a crucial passage of the *Epideixis*, Irenaeus asserts that is was *necessary* not only for Christ to recapitulate Adam, but also for Mary to recapitulate Eve:

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[57] 3.22.4 (SC 211 pp. 438-443): 'Mary the Virgin is found obedient, saying, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word'. But Eve was disobedient, for she did not obey when she was yet a virgin [. . .] and having become disobedient, was made the cause of death both to herself and to the entire human race. So also Mary, having a man betrothed to her yet nevertheless a virgin, was obedient and was made the cause of salvation both to herself and the whole human race. For this reason does the law call a woman betrothed to a man the wife of him who has betrothed her, although she is yet a virgin, thus signifying the circling back from Mary to Eve. For that which has been tied cannot be loosed unless one reverses the ties of the knot, so that the first ties are undone by the second, and the second frees the first.'

[58] 3.22.4.

[59] 5.19.1; *Epid.* 33.

[60] *Epid.* 33.

[61] 3.22.4.

> oportebat-et-conveniebat enim recapitulari (ἀνακεφαλαιόομαι) Adam in Christum, «ut absorptum-deglutiretur (καταπίνω) mortale ab immortalitate», et Evam in Mariam, ut Virgo virginis advocata facta solveret-et-evacuaret (ἐκλύω) virginalem inobaudientiam per virginalem obaudientiam.[62]

It is here that Irenaeus' Mariology takes on a unique flavour and the contrasting parallelism between Eve and Mary goes far beyond anything offered in Justin. Not only is the Virgin Mary presented as the aesthetic counterpart to the first woman, she is also assigned an active and essential role in the recapitulation of man that extends beyond her role as bearer of the incarnate Son of God. The aesthetic of parallelism has been taken to new heights. But is this thematic expansion appropriate? Here one returns to the question of underlying motivation that Irenaean scholarship has never sufficiently addressed. Is the role accorded to Mary simply an expansion of what may have already been a 'traditional' Eve-Mary parallelism, worked out by an author whose love for aesthetic balance provided the impetus for such an expansive treatment?[63] If so, it seems that Irenaeus' claims of the necessity of Eve's recapitulation in Mary and the latter's status as *advocata* and source of freedom stand on questionable theological ground, if they do not in fact contradict outright his own claims of salvation as offered uniquely in and by Christ.[64] It is, however, possible to discover in Irenaeus a motivation for his Marian doctrines that extends past the aesthetic and rests upon foundational anthropological and theological beliefs, and which thereby gives some level of justification to his more radical attributions of influence to Mary. It is to this discussion that we must now turn.

The Eve-Mary Parallel and Social Recapitulation

The Eve-Mary parallel, as described above, is based upon a correspondence of the persons of Eve and Mary in the same manner as that between Adam and Christ. Irenaeus presents a deeply holistic typology wherein type and antitype are connected in a real and ontological man-

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[62] *Epid.* 33 (SC 406 p. 130): 'It was necessary and proper for Adam to be recapitulated in Christ, that 'mortality might be swallowed up by immortality'; and for Eve to be recapitulated in Mary, that a Virgin, become advocate for a virgin, might undo and destroy the virginal disobedience by virginal obedience.' Quotations from the *Epid.* are throughout taken from the critical Latin translation of Rousseau, as accessible to a wider readership than the Armenian (as found in PO:12). This Latin edition contains no departures from the Armenian on points of key vocabulary in this study.

[63] On Irenaeus' fondness for logical aesthetic, see Osborn, *Irenaeus* 18-20, 173.

[64] 1.10.1-2, 5.36.1-3; *Epid.* 7.

ner, such that the activities of either one intimately effect the existence of the other. As such, the 'revivification' of humanity in the person of Christ is connected to the existence of Adam whose antitype He is, and thus Adam, too, is revivified in Christ.[65] So also with Mary, the antitype of Eve, is the existence of the two intimately interconnected. The lives of the two types (Adam and Eve) are, by both similarity and contrast, indicative of the antitypes to come, and by virtue of their antecedent date are influential in forming the human condition into which the antitypes will arrive. The latter (Christ and Mary) are recapitulatively influential upon the former through the underlying ontological connection shared by type and antitype. Christ's life is in some sense Adam's life re-lived, and so too is Eve's life re-lived in Mary. But it is precisely this 'so too' that is problematic. Is it really necessary? To state the question differently, is not Christ's recapitulation sufficient for the salvation of humankind, without need for a co-ordinate recapitulation by His mother? If Adam is characterised as the type of human nature itself,[66] then it will logically follow that the recapitulation of Adam equates to the recapitulation of humanity, and that the recapitulation of Eve is in some sense an extraneous parallel wrought more for the sake of fitting beauty in the economy than for any inherently saving value.[67] This view, however, does not square with Irenaeus' insistence upon the necessity of Mary's recapitulative role in the salvation story. Her part in the process of recapitulation is seemingly presented as both necessary and yet redundant—a dilemma which, if it holds, presents serious problems for Irenaeus' Mariology on a larger scale. It is, however, a dilemma that has not been addressed in any work of Irenaean scholarship to date, despite the popularity of treating the recapitulative and parallelism-oriented passages which give it rise.

This dilemma of necessity and redundancy, this 'logical' conclusion to the traditional interpretation of Irenaeus' Eve-Mary parallel, takes its source from what, with respect to Irenaean scholarship, is an inherently inadequate

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[65] 1.28.1, 3.23.

[66] 3.18.1, 4.34.4, 5.1.3, 5.34.2, *Epid.* 32, and repeatedly throughout the corpus.

[67] An argument might be made for such a view, based on Irenaeus' assertion in 5.21.1 that 'the enemy would not have been fairly vanquished unless it had been a man born of a woman that conquered him', a thought which echoes Justin's argument that the Virgin birth came about 'in order that the disobedience which proceeded from the serpent might receive its destruction in the same manner in which it derived its origin' (*Dial.* 100), both of which arguments are predominantly aesthetic. Yet, as I argue below, such a view alone does not adequately account for Irenaeus' larger conceptions of the role of Mary.

conception of humanity as typified in the persons of Adam and Eve. More specifically, the general conception of Adam as first human and Eve merely as a second human without further clarification, precipitates the problem outlined above, namely that an independent salvation (recapitulation) for the second human seems superfluous if humanity has already received its salvation in the recapitulation of Adam, unless it be prescribed that every human individual requires a distinct and separate recapitulation by another (!), which Irenaeus nowhere suggests. One is thus left with two possibilities: either the dilemma holds and Irenaeus' belief in the necessity of Eve's recapitulation in Mary is an over-extension of his aesthetic ideal, or there must exist some kind of distinction in the human roles of Adam and Eve that warrants a co-ordinate recapitulation of each. There is, as I shall show below, ample evidence in the author's extant corpus to validate the latter possibility.

The *Epideixis* proves an invaluable tool in assessing the character of Adam and Eve as types of humankind, especially in those chapters (11-18) where Irenaeus describes the creation of humanity and its 'fall'. With respect to the former, it is extremely important that Irenaeus here gleans his details from the second creation account in Genesis, with its presentation of man and woman as created separately (Gen 2.7-25), rather than the first account with its simultaneous creation (Gen 1.26-27). Man (ὁ ἄνθρωπος, *humanity*) is fashioned by God in the person of Adam, set up in Paradise and made lord over the earth.[68] Irenaeus presents Adam's creation, up until chapter 13, as human creation *entière*: it is he who will develop into perfection, he who will rule over the beasts of the earth and the angels set as servants in it, he who will walk with the Word of God as a prefiguring of the future Incarnation.[69] Only when this image of creation is wholly presented and man has already begun the course of his existence, does Irenaeus speak of the creation of Eve:

> Beneplacitum autem fuit ei et adiutorium homini facere; sic enim dixit Deus: «Non bonum est esse hominem solum; faciamus ei adiutorium secundum se»: in aliis enim omnibus animalibus non inveniebatur par-et-aequale (ἴσος) et simile Adae adiutorium. Ipse autem Deus exstasim misit super Adam et insomnum-fecit et, ut opus ex opere perficeretur, non factus in paradiso somnus hic factus est super Adam, volente Deo. Et sumpsit Deus unam de costis Adae et replevit pro ea carnem, et costam quam sumpsit aedificavit in mulierem

[68] *Epid.* 11-12.
[69] *Epid.* 12.

> et sic adduxit coram Adam. Is autem videns dixit: «Hoc nunc os ex ossibus meis, caro de carne mea; haec vocabitur mulier, quoniam de viro suo sumpta est.»[70]

Eve is created as Adam's 'helper', a term whose importance is stressed by its repetition three times in a single sentence of the above passage, drawn once from Scripture (Gen 2.18)[71] and twice of Irenaeus' own formulation. The character of her creation is therein substantially different from that of Adam: not only was she *of* Adam, since, coming from his rib, she had her nature as human directly from his and was not a new creation in the same sense as he had been; but she also was *for* Adam, made for his aid and companionship along the necessary pathway of human growth.[72] Eve was, from her inception, a social creature, symbolically embodying not so much human *nature* (for Adam was ἄνθρωπος and Eve ἐκ ἀνθρώπου) as the human *society* formed by God in light of the fact that 'it is not good for man to be alone'. Humanity, both in its individual, essential nature (embodied in Adam) and its social aspect as one body of many members meant for the mutual support of one another (embodied in Eve, Adam's helper, and later in the Church), was to 'receive growth and a long period of existence',[73] that eventually humankind might come to exist wholly in the perfect image and likeness of God.[74]

But Eve's role as 'helper' was to take a disastrous turn in the fall. She who was created to aid Adam in his growth was instead persuaded by the serpent to lead him into the transgression of the one commandment that God had given for the maintenance of their incorruptibility: the prohibition on

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[70] *Epid.* 13 (SC 406 pp. 100-2): '[God] was well-pleased also to make a helper (*adiutorium*) for the man, for thus God said: 'It is not good for man to be alone, let us make a helper fit for him' (cf. Gen 2.18), since among all the animals no helper was found equal and like unto Adam. So God Himself caused a deep rapture to come upon Adam and put him to sleep, and, that a work might be accomplished out of a work, sleep not being in Paradise, it came upon Adam by the will of God. And God took one of Adam's ribs and replaced it with flesh, and He built up the rib which He took into a woman, and in this way He brought her before Adam. And he, seeing her, said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman", for she was taken from her man' (cf. Gen 2.23).'

[71] The LXX employs βοηθός, in most instances translated by the Latin *adiutor/adiutorium*.

[72] Such pathway as is described in, e.g., 4.28.1-3; *Epid.* 12.

[73] 4.28.3.

[74] 4.28.4, 5.28.4.

the Tree of Knowledge (Gen 2.16-17).[75] In heeding the serpent and convincing Adam to partake of the fruit, the whole character of human society as a means of help and support was overturned: through the same virgin meant to be his greatest aid, 'man was struck and, falling, died'.[76] Adam's own sin struck at the heart of human nature, and thus at Eve who had her nature in him; yet as embodiments of human and helper, Adam and Eve were disobedient in different ways and likewise were differently effected by their disobedience. Adam, Irenaeus' own Everyman, sinned in becoming less than his nature—in turning away from the source of his essence. Eve, though effected by the above through her connection to Adam, sinned differently in turning from her own purpose, the aid to life becoming the 'cause of death'[77]—the one individual through whom 'the human race fell into bondage to death'.[78] There was a double fall in Paradise: the fall of man *as man* through the departure from the nature of ἄνθρωπος that Irenaeus sees most prominently in the disobedience of Adam; and the fall of man *as men*, as a community of *adiutores*, which Irenaeus associates most directly with the disobedience of Eve. Both were fatal, for interrelated yet distinct reasons. The disruption of human nature meant death; the corruption of human interrelation meant that the very character of the human society, intended to aid man in his growth into God-likeness, would now lead to death. Through the corruption of human nature, man died. Through the corruption of the social role of human relationships, 'wickedness, spreading out for a long time, laid hold of the entire race of men, to such a degree that there was very little seed of righteousness in them'.[79]

It is necessary to note that the tidy categorisation of roles employed here is not Irenaeus' own. True to his overall style, Irenaeus never treats systematically of a distinction of roles in Adam and Eve, nor does he speak categorically of a typological cast unique to each.[80] But it is equally important to consider that Irenaeus' polemic is not aimed at the definition of

[75] *Epid.* 15.

[76] *Epid.* 33, from the Armenian; see Behr, *Apostolic Preaching* 61. The Latin lacks 'struck'.

[77] 3.22.4.

[78] 5.19.1.

[79] *Epid.* 18.

[80] On Irenaeus' literary style and method, see the cogent summary throughout Donovan, *One Right Reading? A Guide to Irenaeus* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1997) esp. pp. 14-17; cf. also Behr, *Apostolic Preaching* 15 n. 7.

such precise typological categories, and it is not the present author's contention that he accomplishes as much. Rather, as the above references and discussion will have shown, there is a tenor to Irenaeus' polemic and discussion of these two individuals that indicates a certain division of symbolism between them, and Irenaeus' reference to the necessity of the recapitulative activity of each substantially reinforces this division. Though the explicit delineation of the distinction may be only nascent in Irenaeus' writings, and perhaps was so in his mind as well, it is nonetheless evidenced generally in his protological discussions, and, as we shall see, proves a fruitful ground for scholarly investigation into the more intricate aspects of Irenaeus' anthropological and soteriological thought.

Hence one returns to Mary and Christ. In light of what has been said above, their characters as antitypes of Eve and Adam may begin to leave behind a sense of duplication, of twin type/antitype relationships existing side-by-side. As Adam and Eve embody interrelated yet distinct aspects of human existence, so do Christ and Mary sum up in themselves distinct aspects of the human condition. Jesus Christ, as 'new Adam', recapitulates in Himself the human nature of which Adam was the primal exemplar, namely the very essence and being of ἄνθρωπος which had been the fabric of Adam's existence and which had been corrupted by his fall. It is 'this man'[81] that Christ recapitulates, 'preserving the analogy of man'[82] by taking on the full nature of Adam and vanquishing the foe 'in Adam'.[83] As Adam is, in some sense, *the* human, Christ works the salvation of human nature by becoming 'Adam' and recapitulating the disobedience of the type in the perfect obedience of the antitype.[84] The essence of human nature is healed and restored when the incarnate Christ reunites man and God from their artificial separation, thus 'revivifying' the former.[85]

The person of Mary, then, stands in need of Christ's recapitulative activity in the same manner as all other persons: as humanity is shared by all, so do all stand in need of humanity's healing.[86] But as the antitype of Eve,

[81] *Epid.* 32.

[82] 3.22.1.

[83] *Epid.* 31.

[84] See 5.21.1: 'Therefore does the Lord profess Himself to be the Son of man, recapitulating in Himself that original man out of whom the woman was fashioned, in order that, as our species went down to death through a conquered man, so may we ascend again to life through a victorious one.'

[85] *Epid.* 40.

[86] *Epid.* 31.

Mary is also in the unique position of being herself recapitulatory, not in the same sense as Christ whose recapitulation is of human nature, but as one whose role in the recapitulative economy is to restore the proper character of human interrelatedness that this nature requires. Irenaeus can see this as a role distinct from that of Christ inasmuch as the healing of social relationships requires a *relationship*, requires more than one person. Even as Adam could not have been the cause of corruption to the purposed nature of human interaction without the presence and activity of another (Eve), so Christ could not have been the cause of a restoration of these relationships without the presence of another person working in concert with His own recapitulative activities. This notion is tremendously instructive for an interpretation of Irenaeus' passages on what might otherwise seem the 'independent' role of Mary in human salvation. His imagery of the 'knot' tied by Eve and requiring to be loosed by Mary,[87] refers specifically to the fact that Eve's disobedience had bound the nature of human relationships into a detrimental state bent on turning men away from the intentions of God, a state that could only be cast off through the life of one who again established human social interaction as an assistance and aid to the divine purpose. Mary becomes Eve's 'advocate'[88] not only because she brings forth the Christ who is humanity's one intercessor,[89] but also because she restores, in concert with the life of her Son, the character of the human 'other' as *helper*. Where Eve's fall from the role of helper to Adam threw all of humanity into bondage to death, Mary's restoration of that role in her obedience to God 'rescued' that same humankind;[90] and inasmuch as Mary's obedience brought forth Christ who revivified human nature itself, she became even the helper of Eve through the aid given to her Son. It is in this context that what was before a problematic comment becomes theologically explicable:

> It was necessary and proper for Adam to be recapitulated in Christ [. . .] and for Eve to be recapitulated in Mary, that a Virgin, become advocate for a virgin, might undo and destroy the virginal disobedience by virginal obedience.[91]

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[87] 3.22.4.
[88] 5.19.1.
[89] Cf. 1 Tim 2.5.
[90] 5.19.1.
[91] *Epid.* 33.

As humanity had fallen both individually and socially, it was necessary that salvation be worked among men both individually and socially.[92] Within this context, the cooperation with Christ of an obedient human person in the recapitulation of humanity is not only poetically and aesthetically artful, but in fact genuinely necessary if the whole effect of the disobedience in Paradise is to be overcome. The true balance of human existence in its largest sense is only restored when human nature, renewed by Christ, is set into its proper relational context of support and aid, which Irenaeus sees as the unique accomplishment of the Virgin Mary.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, it should be restated that Irenaeus' use of Mary in both polemic and positive theology still holds the potential for further clarification of some of his most essential doctrines. If the above has been successful, it will have shown that the inherent dilemma posed by the traditional interpretation of Irenaeus' Eve-Mary parallel in fact points to a much more intricate typological anthropology than Irenaeus is generally considered to present. Not only does he make full use of the anti-docetic and anti-adoptionist value of Mary's person and role in the Incarnation, he presents her as an integral and essential component of a theologically coherent system of personal and social recapitulation.

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[92] Again in following with the cardinal notion of recapitulation, namely that all the actions and states of fallen humanity are re-worked in holiness; see 2.22.4, *Epid.* 37.

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